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## Some Views on the Archaeology of the Driftless Area in Iowa

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The archaeology of the Driftless Area in Iowa encompasses a time frame extending from approximately 10,000 B.C. to Euroamerican contact. Researchers have defined a series of prehistoric adaptations for this period which can be conveniently grouped under two major modes of production: hunting/gathering and hunting/gathering-horticultural. By analyzing the evolution of these modes it may be possible to define prehistoric belief systems and the manner in which they functioned as significant components in the adaptation process. This combined scientific-humanistic approach may contribute toward a broader understanding of the prehistory of this region.

INDEX DESCRIPTORS: archaeology, prehistory, cosmology

The "Driftless Area" is a term used to describe a distinctive physiographic region occurring within portions of four Midwestern states — northeastern Iowa, southwestern Wisconsin, southeastern Minnesota, and northwestern Illinois. For Iowa the Driftless Area consists of a narrow, irregularly-shaped strip of land paralleling the Mississippi River in the northeastern part of the state. In form it resembles a great inverted triangle with the base located along the Iowa-Minnesota border and the apex positioned in the extreme northeastern portion of Jackson County. The term "driftless," while no longer appropriate in light of recent geological studies, is still useful. Through time it has become synonymous with the rugged landscape of northeastern Iowa. And, it is this particular feature — nearly 4000 square miles of heavily dissected topography consisting of common bedrock exposures, steep valleys, and almost 600 feet of relief — which makes the Driftless Area so distinctive. In the words of Samuel Calvin, an early Iowa geologist, this topographic unit of intense water-carved relief is an area "... gashed and furrowed in every direction by an intricate system of ramifying channels" (Calvin 1895:2).

Biologically, it may be described as part of the greater northeastern Iowa ecotone, the zone where the deciduous forest biome of eastern North America and the grassland steppe biome of the western province meet. This ecotonal region contains at least four defined environmental zones: tall-grass prairie, parkland, forest, and riverine. Their distinctiveness derives from the fact that they do not perceptibly grade into one another. Instead, there is definite interdigitation which produces an array of microenvironmental zones with a resultant "mosaic" pattern. Why this distinctive mosaic ecotone occurs in extreme northeastern and adjacent "driftless" areas is largely explainable in terms of topography. Over twenty years ago the biologist Thomas Hartley cogently noted that the eroded and dissected terrain causes an interruption of the normal environmental patterns which extends and stabilizes plant communities well outside their regular geographic range. Consequently, the range of wildlife is enlarged rather than being restricted to more specific environments (Hartley 1962).

It is these factors — the physical landscape and the biologic communities, and the relationships between them — that served as the context for prehistoric Native American adaptations. To these early peoples the Driftless Area offered shelter and sustenance in the form of protected rockshelters, river and stream terraces, and various kinds of annually recurring plants and animals. What was required of them (the Native Americans), was that they learn how to use the mosaically distributed resources judiciously and systematically. The ways in which they did and how they constructed and attempted to integrate their social rhythms with those of the natural world constitutes the archaeology of the Driftless Area in Iowa.

The synthesis of this region's prehistory, though, remains to be written. While numerous researchers have focused on certain of its

varied cultures and stages — some to considerable depth — the attempt to meld almost a century and a half of archaeological investigations into a cohesive study has yet to be undertaken. Such a task would far exceed the limits of this paper. Given this situation it is possible, however, to present an overview which will familiarize the reader with the major cultural periods and some of the research problems. In so doing it should be kept in mind that the views presented are, for the most part, tentative and hypothetical. They represent one individual's understanding and interpretation of the prehistory of a particular portion of the Upper Mississippi region.

The study of this area's first inhabitants began during the initial phases of Euroamerican settlement. In the first half of the 19th century, wave after wave of settlers moved steadily across the Midwest. Those reaching northeastern Iowa soon noticed that here, as elsewhere, other cultures had preceded them. The evidence was widespread. Earthen mounds of varying sizes and shapes, many in the forms of animals, seemed to be everywhere, especially along the ridges and bluffs of the Mississippi River and its principal tributaries. The earthen structures, though, were not a new phenomenon to many of the settlers, particularly those who had passed previously through Ohio and the adjacent states. There, they had encountered colossal aggregations of earthworks and mounds. Many had also become familiar with various interpretations regarding their origins and builders. At the time, the most prevalent and popular centered on a "vanished race," a civilization then believed to have been distinct from, antecedent, superior, and unrelated to the contemporary Native Americans (Mallam 1976).

The "Mound Builder Myth," as this explanation has become known historically, virtually dominated archaeological research in eastern North America during much of the 19th century. In northeastern Iowa many individuals annually plundered mounds seeking "relics" and additional data to enhance their collections and to support their contentions about the existence of a "vanished race" (Mallam 1982). How deeply embedded this belief was in the minds of 19th century Iowans is perhaps best seen in certain of their mortuary practices. Some, possibly so convinced that a race other than Native Americans had constructed the mounds, even interred their dead in them. Many examples of this kind of bereavement behavior still exist in the Driftless Area (Fig. 1.). It does not seem illogical then, given the wide acceptance of the myth, to propose that whites buried their dead in the mounds in the mistaken belief that they were really interring them with those of a superior race distinct from the Native Americans.

The controversy over authorship of the mounds and the subsequent investigations carried out by private and public agencies during the latter quarter of the 19th century may be said to mark the beginning of serious archaeological studies in the Driftless Area of Iowa. From that point on, beginning with the Northwestern Archaeological Survey in 1880 and the Bureau of Ethnology Division of Mound



Fig. 1 White burials in Native American mounds in the Driftless Area.

Exploration in 1881, the antiquities of this area as well as those of the rest of eastern North America came under increasing degrees of professional inquiry. By the early 1890's accumulating evidence clearly demonstrated that the mounds had been constructed by Native Americans and, furthermore, that mound building had a tradition of considerable time depth (Thomas 1894).

Since that time archaeological studies in the Driftless Area have encompassed a broad range of topics, interests, and goals. Of these, the delineation of culture sequence has been a primary concern. Two individuals in particular, Ellison Orr, a Waukon, Iowa, resident and archaeological enthusiast, and Dr. Charles R. Keyes of Cornell College, Director of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, spent the majority of their careers addressing this problem (Keyes 1935). Together, they conducted surveys and excavations of mound groups and village sites throughout northeastern Iowa and across the state in general. The 1930's period was especially productive. During this time Keyes and Orr, supported by federal funding, accumulated the kinds of data necessary for constructing sequences and defining prehistoric cultures. Orr later wrote several volumes concerning their findings. Entitled "The Iowa Archaeological Reports: 1934-1939," these studies, particularly Volumes I, IV, V, and XII (Orr 1963), still constitute the basic sources for archaeological research in the Driftless Area. The dedication of these two men to archaeology and their efforts to preserve significant features of Iowa's past have earned them the title, "The Founding Fathers of Iowa Archaeology." In recognition of their contributions the Iowa Archaeological Society annually presents a Keyes-Orr Award for outstanding service to the field of archaeology.

Following the Keyes-Orr period in archaeological research, roughly 1920 to 1950, the discipline has continued to emphasize culture chronology and the reconstruction of prehistoric lifeways. However, since the mid-1960's, a new goal has been added. Archaeologists now place emphasis on explaining the variability of the past through creation of behavioral models with testable hypotheses. This search for an understanding of culture change and the reasons accounting for differences in prehistoric adaptations grows progressively more involved. Presently, archaeology is no longer the domain or interest area of a few individuals or institutions. Instead, it represents a collective effort on the part of many institutions and state agencies to develop an agenda of topics and research and to pool their resources in the study of the past. Through this kind of long-term cooperation a multidisciplinary approach to prehistory has been fostered.

To date, past and present archaeological research in the Driftless Area have combined to produce a culture sequence which begins around 10,000 B.C. and extends to the beginning of Euroamerican contact in the latter half of the 17th century A.D. This sequence is

practically identical with those developed for the Midwest and Upper Mississippi areas. Evolutionary in design, it provides the structure for defining and examining a series of adaptations which range in complexity from the early hunters and gatherers to the later semi-sedentary village horticultural/hunter-gatherers. The sequence, its divisions, and time frames are as follows:

Paleo-Indian	-	?10,000 B.C. to 7000 B.C.
Archaic	-	7000 B.C. to 1000 B.C.
Early Woodland	-	1000 B.C. to 500 B.C.
Middle Woodland	-	500 B.C. to A.D. 300 - 500
Late Woodland	-	A.D. 300 to A.D. 1200 - 1300
Oneota	-	A.D. 1100 to Contact

Few archaeologists, however, would accept this sequence without first proposing changes in the time scheme. For example, some would prefer a longer frame for the Paleo-Indian period, an extension perhaps to 5000 B.C. Others might argue that neither Early nor Middle Woodland are widespread nor well-pronounced in the Driftless Area and should be accorded only minimal attention. The alterations and modifications that could be introduced are as varied as the number of archaeologists conducting research in this area. Such concerns over chronology, phases, artifact placement, etc. only serve to dramatize what the art historian George Kubler pointed out years ago (Kubler 1962:2):

The narrative historian always has the privilege of deciding that continuity cuts better into certain lengths than into others. He never is required to defend his cut, because history cuts anywhere with equal ease, and a good story can begin anywhere the teller chooses.

Disagreement with the sequence, though, tends more to reflect its utility than to expose its weaknesses. In general, it functions as a guide to the past with flexible boundaries, the means, chronologically, by which members of the profession structure their research and promote dialogue. However valuable it may be to the academic community, it does possess certain limitations for the non-professional. Without a fairly sound background in the discipline the sequence becomes more a labyrinth than a guide. To the beginner, therefore, it is all too easy to wander in a maze of artifact types, time frames, and hazy relationships.

One way in which this complexity might be reduced is to divide the past and the element of time into modes of production. This term refers to the ways and relationships — social, material, and ideological — which people enter into to effect production and to satisfy biological and cultural needs (Keenan 1981:3-4). Through time these arrangements result not only in the production of goods but also in the reproduction and modification of the mode (Godelier 1977). In this sense the mode of production is the mode of life — an interrelated series of dynamic, ongoing relationships between humans and between them and the environments in which they live (Harrington 1976:83-103).

For our purposes in assessing the archaeology of the Driftless Area two modes of production may be proposed: a very long hunting and gathering mode followed by a relatively short dual subsistence (horticulture combined with hunting and gathering) mode. Together, they encompass the complete culture sequence and time frame previously discussed and contribute toward an understanding of how prehistoric peoples adapted to this distinctive environment.

The hunting and gathering mode represents an adaptation in which people participated in natural production. During this time, approximately 10,000 B.C. to A.D. 1000, human groups, with increasing degrees of sophistication, extracted a living from naturally occurring resources. Such an adaptation demanded an intimate familiarity with the cycles of various plants and animals and the seasons in which they achieved their highest levels of productivity. Moreover, it necessitated social flexibility in human numbers and distribution. Humans had to learn to adjust their populations to the carrying capacity of the environment and to the ebb and flow of seasonal resources. In time

these adjustments tended to produce, as the anthropologist Marvin Harris (1977:281) has suggested, a "seamless unity" between culture and environment.

The beginnings of the hunting and gathering mode in the Driftless Area, generally referred to as the Paleo-Indian period, are not well known. In fact, for the first 5000 years we possess only a few clues which must be supplemented with information from better known surrounding areas if a picture is to emerge. During this time it appears that small families of hunters and gatherers, sometimes merging into bands, moved throughout the heavily dissected terrain in search of large game animals. Their quest must have been successful for in almost any sizeable artifact collection the archaeologist will usually note several distinctively flaked projectile points which are diagnostic markers for this period. These points, lanceolate forms with meticulous flaking, edge and basal grinding, and occasional channel flake scars along the blade faces, are generally found along the crests of bluffs and ridges (Mallam 1971). The sites, probably vantage points and hunting stations, represent only a small segment of these people's lifeways. We have yet to reconstruct their annual economic cycle. If we were to do so, we would probably discover that large game animals, while a significant food source, were heavily supplemented by smaller species and plant collecting. Some archaeologists would expand this point further claiming that a large game hunting tradition never existed in this part of North America. Instead, they see generalized hunters and gatherers adopting the specialized projectile point technology but using it for lesser species such as deer and elk.

By at least 5000 B.C. and perhaps earlier, major alterations occurred in the mode. For some time the late and post-glacial environment of the early hunters and gatherers had been steadily changing. In the Driftless Area as elsewhere a gradual warming climatic shift occasioned significant modifications in plant and animal communities. It was perhaps at this time that the mosaic environmental pattern began to supplant the pine forests of the glacial age. As the large game animals drifted north the hunters and gatherers responded by developing different exploitation strategies. No longer did they concentrate on a few species. Instead, they seem to have expanded their entire subsistence pattern to include a variety of plants with particular emphasis on deer and smaller animals. What had occurred economically as a result of climatic change was a shift in the proportion of reliance.

Most archaeologists prefer to call this changing period the "Archaic" to differentiate it from the preceding Paleo-Indian era. To some it constitutes the foundation on which all subsequent Native American adaptations occurred. Its key features were adaptability and efficiency. By adapting to and efficiently using in their subsistence pattern a broad range of plants and animals, human groups began to realize the possibilities contained within the hunting and gathering mode. It might be said that humans ceased to be concerned with the life cycles of only a few species and, instead, adapted themselves to the life cycle of the total environment. This broadening pattern of exploitation, in turn, permitted a greater degree of residential stability.

The emerging pattern, "Primary Forest Efficiency," as the archaeologist Joseph Caldwell labeled it for the eastern United States, was marked by multifocus exploitation, seasonal and cyclical scheduling of different plants and animals, the coalescence and dispersal of human groups in correlation with environmental productive cycles, and a proliferation of tools and techniques (Caldwell 1958). The adaptability of this pattern facilitated human movement into virtually every ecological zone in the New World. In effect, the archaeological record reveals the emergence and stabilization of lifeways predicated on systematic and balanced exploitation. This intimate familiarity with the life process may have been the catalyst in the long and gradual development of what Christopher Vecsey has called "Native American environmental religions," the evolution of a moral philosophy

with attendant rituals concerning relationships between humans and between themselves and the natural world (Vecsey 1980).

From the Archaic period on, the surface of the Driftless Area begins to assume the form of a cultural landscape. Campsites, hunting and gathering stations, and habitation areas literally blanket the terraces of the river valleys, streams, and uplands. Their ubiquitous presence indicates that the environment was being used more intensively, physical space was being filled, a population increase was underway, and that some form of social organization extending beyond the family band would be necessary to avoid conflict and to insure equal and continued access to productive resources. By 1000 B.C. or thereabouts, a time generally used to affix the beginning of the Woodland period, these combined factors had reached a level capable of generating a cultural-ecological crisis.

The crisis does not seem to have affected the Driftless Area on the scale that it did in other areas of the Midwest, especially Illinois and the central Ohio River Valley. There, a major change occurred in the mode of production marking the onset of the Middle Woodland period. Perhaps due to a greater intensification of population, this area — particularly the Ohio River Valley — became the center for the development of more productive subsistence techniques and the emergence of a complex form of social organization. The Hopewell Interaction Sphere, as this organization is known archaeologically, emerged as a great network of social, economic, and political relationships which connected many distant and disparate cultures and bound them together into a collective entity united by a common ideology (see Brose and Greber 1979).

This system's most visible features were large burial mounds, huge ceremonial centers demarcated by intricate arrangements of earthworks, a "death cult," exotic, status-differentiating objects, and social stratification. It appears that this far-reaching hierarchical organization was maintained and made possible through an intensification of hunting and gathering. Stuart Struever of Northwestern University calls this subsistence pattern "Intensive Harvest Collecting." It involved large numbers of people who focused their efforts seasonally on resources, especially aquatic foodstuffs, that were "... concentrated, high-yielding, predictable, and annually renewable" (Struever 1968:305). In addition, there is some evidence that limited horticulture was practiced. Apparently, this system, by providing the structure and rationale for intergroup association and contact, insured regular production and distribution of foodstuffs, territorial sanctity, and widespread peace.

It did not last. By A.D. 300 the system began to dissociate. The reasons accounting for its failure are numerous and varied. One factor, though, appears certain: hunting and gathering as a mode of production seems to require an egalitarian social framework in order to be consistently successful, a type of interaction between humans and the environment that cannot be long maintained by socially stratified forms. It seems likely, therefore, that the network, originally formed to promote peace and maintain access to resources through the principle of egalitarianism, eventually reached a point where emphasis shifted from collective goals to private lineage interests. When this occurred, Hopewell ideology was discarded because its founding principle and symbols were no longer functional. The evolution of a stratified society constituted an abrogation of the moral philosophy of balance which emerged as a consequence of multifocus exploitation.

The impact of the Interaction Sphere at its height and fragmentation had little effect on the Driftless Area. Certainly, its population was contacted and, to a limited degree, may even have participated in the exchange network. But, for the most part, the record reveals the continuation of an essentially Archaic pattern which incorporated pottery, various mound building practices, and certain subsistence techniques into its multifocus lifeway. The crisis of space and resources here seems to have been averted by reemphasizing egalitarianism and human/land relationships.



Synonymous with the Late Woodland period, this adaptation in the Driftless Area, including parts of Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin, achieved a point best envisioned as a regional florescence. The subsistence pattern expanded to include Intensive Harvest Collecting, the practicing of limited horticulture, and a fairly well defined matrix of band territories (Mallam 1976). Instead of constructing earthen monuments to enshrine and enhance social differences it seems that they produced earthen structures to symbolize their relationships to the forces of life.

This distinctive lifeway, referred to as the Effigy Mound tradition, existed for at least 500 years, from A.D. 700 to A.D. 1200 - 1300. During this time peoples throughout the Driftless Area constructed mounds in the forms of animals, conicals, linears, and compounds. Their arrangement and location, usually near zones of predictable and annually recurring natural resources, indicate a complex set of ideological, social, political, and economic relationships. It may be suggested that this pattern of mound construction reflected a particular belief, one based upon lessons learned through thousands of years of participation in natural production: humans must assume responsibility for the quality of life by respecting the environment which enhances it. If this assessment is correct, the mounds, then, are not so much burial sites as they are metaphorical expressions about the

idealized state that should exist between nature and culture — balance and harmony (Mallam 1982).

If one looks across the rugged landscape of the Driftless Area and the many mounds which accent its surface, the impression cannot be ignored that in this region groups of people expressed their cosmological conviction by "sacralizing" the earth. In other words, they consecrated the mosaic environment with its varied resources and ecological relationships by defining it as sacred space (see Fig. 2). If the rhythm — balance and order — of this region could be maintained the resources on which humans depended would continue. In this sense, mound building may be perceived as an ongoing world renewal ritual, a sacred activity humans entered into in order to insure regular and consistent production of natural resources.

In another sense, it might be worthwhile to consider the Effigy Mound tradition with its attendant symbols and earth-shaping rituals a prehistoric revitalization movement. Although the Driftless Area never seems to have been deeply affected by the Hopewell Interaction Sphere and its philosophy and status-differentiating rituals, the dissolution of this complex and pervading system nonetheless caused reverberations throughout the Midwest. The impact conceivably could have been great enough to occasion a reevaluation of the moral code of balance, an ideological position from which Hopewell so

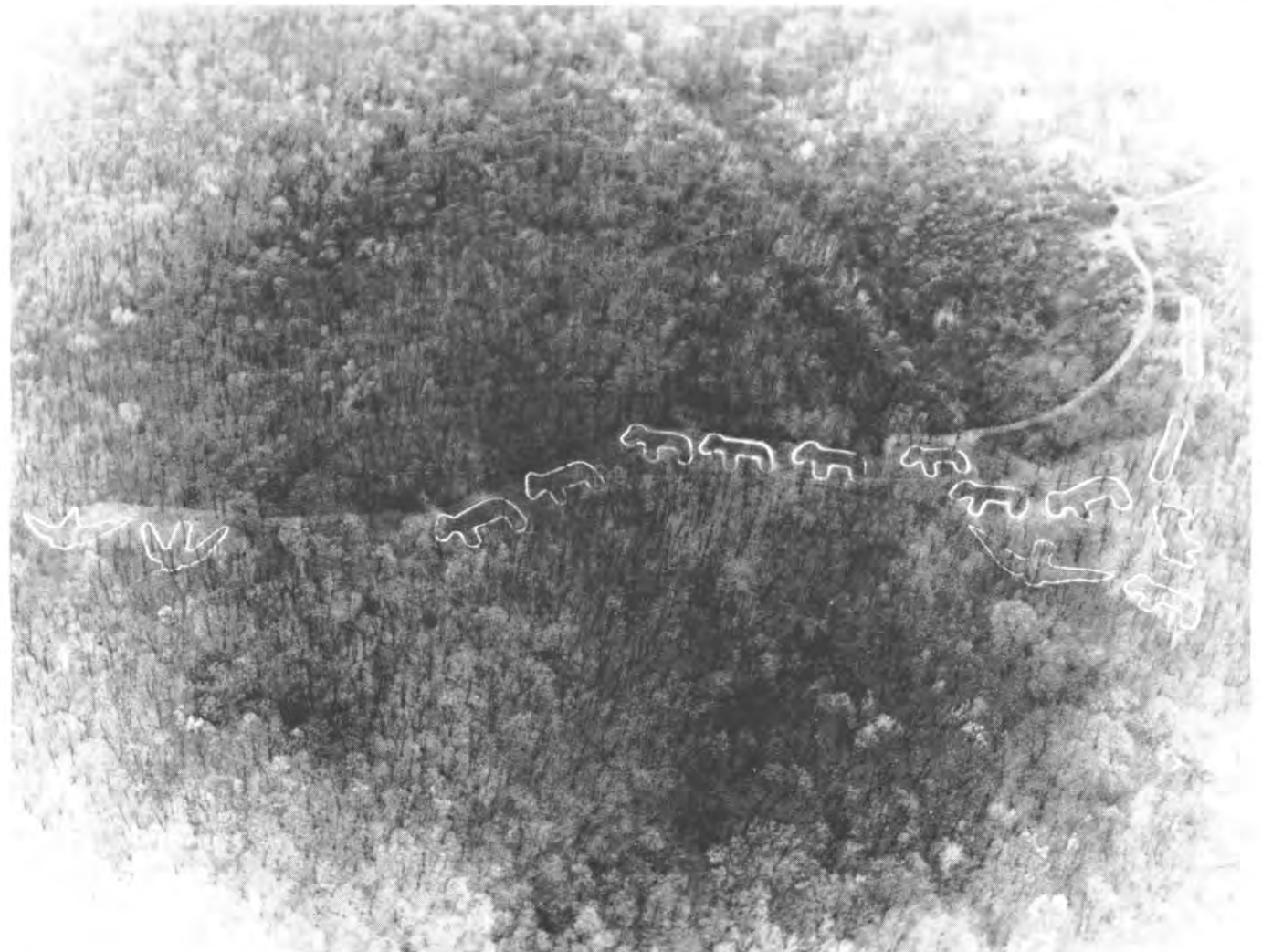


Fig. 2. Sacred Space: The Marching Bear Mound Group, South Unit, Effigy Mounds National Monument.

obviously departed. Interestingly, the archaeological record seems to indicate a hiatus in cultural continuity in this area, as well as the Midwest, between A.D. 300 to A.D. 650 - 700 (Benn 1980; Benn, Mallam and Bettis 1978). Accompanied by many changes ranging from variations in economics to distinctions in mound building techniques and mortuarial items, this interval could be described as a period of cultural distortion, a time when a system is no longer capable of meeting or accommodating the needs of its members (Wallace 1966:159).

When such a situation occurs there tends to be widespread social, cultural, and personal disorganization, all manifest in forms of stress, unpredictability, and disillusionment. Facing disintegration some cultures reestablish order and security through revitalization, a process which involves formulation of a new code and a new model for human existence. If successful, this act of redefinition . . . of recreation . . . results in a changed lifeway and the expression of its status through a new set of symbols (see Wallace 1966:159-162). I think it quite likely, therefore, that a new message about human/nature relationships, based in part on lessons learned during the Archaic period, spread throughout the Upper Mississippi region somewhere around A.D. 650 to A.D. 700. The visible signs of this new faith, this revitalization, this code, are the mounds themselves — orderly and stylized representations of the life force and the life process, an oral tradition about proper relationships sculpted from the earth. Regardless of how mound building is perceived, there can be little disagreement that it was the social means of promoting order and of addressing an inherent contradiction in this mode: at the hunting and gathering level natural resources may not always be abundant or available.

Elsewhere, outside the Driftless Area, this contradiction had become so pronounced that efforts to resolve it led to a mode transformation: dual subsistence (hunting/gathering and horticulture) with an emphasis on horticulture. In some areas, particularly along the middle and lower reaches of the Mississippi, the needs of expanding populations had extended beyond the limits of natural production. There a gradual change in the proportion of reliance from hunting and gathering to horticulture radically altered relationships between humans and between them and the environment. The process of making a living had been transformed from extraction to production. In contrast to the former mode this adaptation was characterized by concentrated, socially stratified populations which were organized at the chiefdom level and who engaged in intensive surplus production.

The new mode rapidly expanded. By A.D. 1100 it seems to have been firmly established in the Driftless Area. There, especially along the great terraces of the Upper Iowa River and its tributaries, members of this energized lifeway constructed large villages and farmed the rich soil of the floodplains (Henning 1961; Wedel 1959). Archaeological data reveal that this culture, referred to as Oneota, also engaged in extensive bison hunting forays, either further west, or, as Dale Henning of Luther College has suggested, among possible resident herds in the Driftless Area.

The origins of this culture which left such an indelible impression on the environment and in the archaeological record in the form of villages, cemeteries, earthen enclosures, and petroglyphs, remain argumentative (Gibbon 1974). Some see it emerging from the resident Woodland hunting and gathering mode, a product of diffusion emanating from Mississippian centers to the south. Others consider it to be a direct consequence of migration. Regardless, its impact on the local population was considerable. In short order they either became Oneota or moved. It appears that the Oneota even used, on occasion, the mounds of the Woodland peoples. In the 1930's Ellison Orr, while conducting excavations in mound groups along the Upper Iowa River, discovered intrusive Oneota burials. This practice may have signified Oneota respect for the preceding lifeway, or,

alternately, served to symbolize their aggregate strength through appropriation of the sacred ground of others. Few, though, would debate either the success or power of this culture. Operating within a new mode of production, its remains can be found in many other Midwestern states — Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, and Nebraska. In Iowa most ethnohistorians would agree that the Oneota, following Euroamerican contact, emerged historically as the Ioway.

The preceding review of the archaeology of the Driftless Area should be regarded as tentative. In particular I have speculated widely concerning the development and function of belief systems at various points in the archaeological record. I have done so in order to emphasize the role of ideology in prehistoric culture investigations, for far too long a neglected field of study. All too often this aspect of culture is considered a "given" in data analysis and interpretation instead of being viewed as a significant component, at times the dominant variable, in culture process. Also, this review contains concepts, interpretations, and theoretical propositions that would not necessarily be acceptable to others. Using the organizing principle of modes of production, it is offered here in the form of a general explanation for the purpose of acquainting readers with one person's perspective of an environmentally and culturally distinct region.

The explanation, however, serves only as a construct for much remains to be done. We need to continue to stress explanation as a goal and to seek its achievement through more extensive multidisciplinary and interagency programs. But, while so engaged we must not lose sight of a far greater issue. Today, the management, conservation, and preservation of Iowa's natural and cultural resources have become paramount concerns which should be addressed in all research programs. We need to keep in mind that should we eventually realize our goal to understand and to explain the past but, in the process, lose the context in which it occurs — the environment — we really will have gained little. The past is much more than a garment bag from which researchers methodically construct patterned quilts. It is also the source from which we generate and create models about human behavior and culture change. Just as surely as the Navajo ". . . think and sing the world into existence" (Witherspoon 1977:17) so do we participate in a similar process of creating and recreating the past on the basis of our theoretical knowledge. If the context for this knowledge disappears the primary means for sensing — apprehending — previous traditions through a humanistic and ideational approach will be substantially reduced.

Perhaps at this stage, as we consider the significance of the Driftless Area from a variety of discipline perspectives, we need to "listen" to those themes that have been generated through 1000's of years of Native American adaptations. In doing so, by preserving and appreciating them and their context, we might recognize that "feeling" the past and the environment is as valid an experience as "knowing" it scientifically.

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